

MARCH 20, 1980

All week long, we've been working cattle, delousing the hard cases and sorting off the thing end for larger feed rations. The work has gone slow. Drouth bitten cows aren't too eager to claim their calves. Also, feeding and pickup breakdowns have taken up a big part of the days. At one time we had more of our rolling stock on tow-lines than we did on self-propulsion. Unless Mr. Carter puts a surcharge on repairs, he can't hurt us on the price of fuel.

The cattle have been easy to gather. One of my helpers can imitate a cow bawling to her calf so close that he ought to be making commercials for a milk company. In fact, if he was as good at reproducing the sound of cake hitting the ground as he is throwing his voice, we could pair up the whole Shortgrass Country without much trouble. I used to envy those mountain yodelers on the radio when I was a kid, but now I'd give anything to be able just to trick an old ewe or an old cow into following me to the house.

Working shorthanded has taught everyone a lot of tricks. We found out as late as this season's calf marking that the black humpy cattle up at the other place were gentler if we rode black horses. Three of us moved a herd of those high strung sisters five miles through six gates and a water lot without them realizing they weren't out taking a long walk across the countryside. I believe on a 10 mile drive they'd have begun to bawl to our old ponies. It was as smooth a trip as you can make on that kind of a deal. I thought of writing CBS and asking them to run our pictures.

The way I learned that trick was watching the dog and chicken business over at Mertzon. Like I told you one time before, a banker over there has a red birddog that has a fierce appetite for feathered drum sticks and raw chicken breasts.

Well, I began to notice that after he thinned out or extinguished every chicken yard in town, all that was left was a flock of Rhode Island Red hens the exact color of that dog. Right to this day, you can see those chickens crossing the highway by the big oak trees at the south end of Mertzon. Old Gus won't touch them; he thinks they are some of his own offspring, which by the way runs into several hundred head of puppies.

I know my protective coloring theory works on white mice and albino tomcats. In the big research centers, white tomcats actually develop a fatherly instinct toward the caged mice as long as a black or sorrel doesn't pop up.

On a sheep outfit, hanging the discarded clothes of the shearers on a fence will calm down the flock. I wouldn't go so far as to say that you ought to wear those old clothes as a disguise, but I'll bet that it'd sure help pen a bunch of spooky yearling ewes to have on a pair of shearer's pants.

Winter has reached the draggy end of the season. Cattle and sheep are showing the stress of the long dry haul. One-half inch of rain would cheer the scene. I'll report on the Rhode Island Reds if there's a change.